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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005064

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TAGS: PREL ENER KNNP PARM TU IR

SUBJECT: TURKEY CONTINUES TO ENGAGE IRAN ON NUCLEAR PROGRAM

REF: ANKARA 3465

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: Turkish officials tell us they are continuing to send a strong and consistent message to Tehran regarding Iran's nuclear development program. During Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Safari's August 25 visit to Ankara, FM Gul reportedly urged Iran to regain the trust of the international community and avoid the imposition of sanctions. The GOT is concerned about the impact of sanctions on Turkey, but recognizes that the onus is on Iran to avoid them. Outgoing Chief of the General Staff (CHOD) Gen. Ozkok warned in his farewell speech on August 28 that Turkey must play an active role in preventing the spread of WMD in the region or risk losing its strategic superiority. We have worked hard to bring Turkey on board with the international consensus against a nuclear-armed Iran; we should continue to share our thinking on the way ahead with the GOT at a high level in order to maintain Turkey's strong support. End summary and comment.

¶2. (C) MFA Arms Control and Disarmament Department Head Serhan Yigit told us August 29 that the GOT continues to send a strong and consistent message to Tehran regarding Iran's nuclear development program. As recently as the August 25 visit to Ankara by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mahdi Safari, Yigit said, the GOT urged Iran to join the international community and avoid the imposition of sanctions. According to Yigit, Safari reaffirmed Iran's right to develop a peaceful nuclear program but stated that Iran is ready to engage in talks. Yigit told us that FM Gul criticized Safari for the delay in announcing Iran's decision and "bringing too little, too late." The UN had taken the step of a Chapter VII resolution, and as UN member, Turkey must abide by its terms. Gul reiterated to Safari the strong message that he had delivered to Iranian NSC Secretary-General Larijani in June on the need for Iran to

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contribute to a peaceful resolution of the issue (reftel).

¶3. (C) Yigit told us that the GOT is concerned about the impact on Turkey of sanctions against Iran. He welcomed US consideration of targeted sanctions against the leadership as opposed to broader economic sanctions, and expressed the GOT's interest in the latest USG thinking on a sanctions regime. In addition to a negative impact on Turkey, the GOT fears that sanctions would further destabilize an already difficult region and questions their effectiveness. Yigit

confided, however, that he was not optimistic sanctions could be avoided at this stage.

¶14. (U) Separately, during the August 28 CHOD change of command ceremony, outgoing CHOD General Hilmi Ozkok complained in his speech that Turkey had distanced itself from the international community's efforts to solve the Iranian nuclear issue. He warned that the existence of WMD in the region would constitute "a serious and direct threat" to Turkey, and that Turkey might lose its strategic superiority in the region if the issue is not resolved. He expressed his concern that the problem would not be solved by the intensive diplomatic efforts now underway, and suggested that Turkey would need to "take an important decision in the near future."

¶15. (C) Comment. We have worked hard over the last nine months to bring a skeptical and sanctions-averse GOT on board with the international consensus that a nuclear-armed Iran constitutes a regional and global threat. Frequent senior-level consultations and regular information/intelligence sharing have been key to our success so far. We cannot take unflinching GOT support for granted, however. Tehran will seek to push the Turks to the sidelines through a combination of inducements (cooperation against Kurdish separatism/terrorism) and thinly-veiled threats (cutting off Turkey's land route to Central Asia). As we plan our way forward, especially following Iran's reply to the P5 plus and ensuing steps among that group and at the UNSC, it is essential that we keep the GOT informed of our thinking. Our recently announced Strategic Vision document offers a context for doing this. We strongly recommend the following steps to keep this country on board: a visit to Turkey by an appropriate senior USG official and/or UNVIE Ambassador Shulte for consultations and briefings on our

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latest understanding of Iranian developments; an invitation for talks in the US, or in Europe when senior US officials such U/S Burns or U/S Joseph are traveling, for the senior MFA official on this issue, Deputy U/S Akgunay; and regular calls by the Secretary to FM Gul. End Comment.

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